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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: NEW NZ FOREIGN MINISTER PLACES HIGH
PRIORITY ON REBUILDING US-NZ BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

1. SUMMARY: For the second day in a row newly-appointed Foreign Minister Winston Peters has publicly indicated that he places high priority on "rebuilding New Zealand's relationships with the United States." END SUMMARY

2. On the second day of the new Foreign Minister's term, the front-page of the country's highest circulation daily ("New Zealand Herald") carried an article entitled "Peters ready to Build US Bridges." The article was written by the newspaper's Assistant Editor, Fran O'Sullivan. Extracts follow.

BEGIN TEXT:

"Foreign Minister Winston Peters says he is prepared to tackle head-on the 'big challenge' of rebuilding New Zealand's relationships with the United States.

"His diplomatic skills will be put to the test early in the New Year when he is expected to lead moves to open discussions with the US about burying the 20-year-old dispute over nuclear ships. Departing US Ambassador Charles Swindells signaled in July that Washington wanted to move on and establish a new security, economic and trade framework to strengthen the relationship.

"Mr. Peters said he could not make any detailed comments until he had been briefed by officials and consulted Prime Minister Helen Clark.

"He may call on political colleagues such as former Trade Ministers Mike Moore (Labour) and Philip Burdon (National) to help push through his initiatives..

"The Foreign Minister also signaled he wanted to play a more active role in the South Pacific, where New Zealand's influence had been reduced since the region became a 'battleground' for Chinese and Taiwanese influence..

"He also indicated he had his views on filling the plum US ambassadorship, which is up for grabs early next year. A raft of high-profile names -- including Governor-General Silvia Cartwright -- has been privately floated.

"But Mr. Peters emphasized the job should be filled by someone with 'diplomatic and trade skills,' saying that he could be prepared to support the appointment of a high-profile former politician who had the right credentials..
END TEXT

3. On day one of in his new position Winston Peters was interviewed on Radio New Zealand's highly-influential flagship program, "Morning Report." A partial transcript follows.

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

INTERVIEWER: In terms of foreign policy do we need closer relations with the United States? Do we need to go ahead with the free trade agreement with China, which this government appears committed to trying to get?

FOREIGN MINISTER PETERS: Well, I think with respect to every country the closer your relationships with them, the better. And obviously if we have differences with other countries, we should try and sort them out and particularly when you are talking about old friends. It is important that you keep them, because in the case of the United States it is the world's biggest economy, but in the case of China we are a long way away from a free trade agreement. Right now I would think dealing with the protocols by way of agreement are important. But I come back to the point that that is in the province, and it has been for a long time, of the Minister of Trade, not the Minister of Foreign Affairs. TRANSCRIPT ENDS.

Regards, Burnett